Department of the Navy
Northwest Range Complex Extension
EIS/OEIS
Community Newsletter

March 2006
Issue 2

The Northwest Range Complex Extension—Update

The Department of the Navy (Navy), Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division (NUWC) Keyport proposes to extend existing areas for operations in waters associated with the Northwest Range Complex in Washington State. The proposed action would provide adequate space to support existing and future research, test, and evaluation operations for the evolving unmanned and manned vehicle program needs in multiple marine environments. This is the second newsletter to update the public on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process associated with this proposal.

The first step in the NEPA process, the scoping period for the Northwest Range Complex Extension Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS), officially ended on January 9, 2004. Publication of the Draft EIS/OEIS is the next step. This was originally planned to occur in 2005; however, due to other Navy priority NEPA efforts and changes in Navy guidelines, publication of the the Draft EIS/OEIS is not anticipated until 2007. Public hearings will occur within 2 to 3 weeks following the Draft EIS/OEIS publication. The Navy continues to keep abreast of the science related to sonar activities, to ensure that the latest data are used in formulation of the EIS/OEIS especially as it relates to marine mammals.

The public is invited to visit the EIS/OEIS website (http://www-keyport.kpt.nuwc.navy.mil/EIS_Home.htm) for further information at any time. Once the schedule has been finalized, this information will be shared with the public through a subsequent newsletter and on the website. In addition to visiting our website, the Navy invites your comments. They can be sent to our new address at: Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest, Attn: Kimberly Kler – Code 05EC3.KK, 1101 Tautog Circle, Suite 203, Silverdale, WA, 98315.

Working with the Community

The personnel at NUWC Keyport are an important part of the community. In October 2005, NUWC Keyport Range Operations personnel and Navy divers used their expertise to locate and recover a downed air ambulance medical helicopter.

ROVs are equipped with sonar, video cameras, lights, and retrieval capabilities and are able to operate to depths of up to 5,000 feet. CURV II, shown here, was used for this recovery mission.

Late in the afternoon of October 6, 2005 the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) requested Navy assistance in the location and recovery of two missing personnel and the twin engine helicopter. Efforts to obtain assistance from capable commercial firms had been unsuccessful, prompting NTSB investigators to request Navy assistance. Commander, Navy Region Northwest coordinated with NUWC Keyport to provide Navy support for search and recovery operations. The U.S. Naval Vessel (USNV) Battlepoint (YTT 10) departed NUWC Keyport on October 7 and arrived on scene within 2 hours. An hour later, the side scan sonar, used to search for objects on the sea floor, was deployed and operating. The debris field was located within 20 minutes and the first piece of the helicopter was recovered using a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) in 530 feet of water. While recovering wreckage debris was important to the crash investigation, locating the pilot and second passenger was the highest priority. Keyport personnel recovered several key pieces of wreckage debris and the body of the pilot. Keyport Range Operations personnel and Navy divers have successfully assisted in recovery efforts over the past decade and continue to provide help to the community.

Whales Vocalize in Dabob Bay

Range operators at NUWC Keyport are trained by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to identify marine mammals. As standard operating procedure, range operators monitor the range prior to conducting any active acoustic operations; this ensures that these operations are not conducted in the presence of whales. In February 2005, six *Orcinus orca* (killer whales) were identified on NUWC Keyport's Dabob Bay Range Site on Hood Canal.

Killer whales in Dabob Bay are an infrequent occurrence, but not unknown. To the best of our knowledge, these six transient whales have not been to the Hood Canal before this event, which started at the end of January 2005. When the orcas began vocalizing near NUWC Keyport's bottom moored hydrophone, it caught the attention of range personnel and they started the system's data recorder—the result was a 42-minute recording of unique vocalizations. These data were then provided to the marine science community and will assist in an increased body of knowledge surrounding these impressive animals.

Navy Partners with U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to Study Hood Canal Dissolved Oxygen Levels

In August 2004, personnel from NUWC Keyport teamed up with the USGS to deploy sensors to assess the levels of dissolved oxygen in Hood Canal. The Navy craft from NUWC Keyport deployed two large sensor tripods for the USGS in the southern portion of Hood Canal near Union, Washington. The sensors measure conductivity, temperature, depth, and oxygen levels; they will also record water currents and measure particulate matter in the water column. The sensor tripods were left in place until the end of October, when the Navy retrieved them. The collected data was then downloaded from the sensors and used by the USGS for interpretation and environmental modeling of the conditions in Hood Canal.

Tripod sensor being deployed to assess dissolved oxygen levels in Hood Canal.

Community Boating Assistance at Dabob Bay Range

During the summer of 2005, a TRIDENT submarine was conducting post-refit sea trials on the Dabob Bay Range when two men boating north of the instrumented range capsized their rowboat. A "boater in distress" call was issued over marine band VHF channel 12 from an unknown caller, alerting boaters in the area and providing the distress location. Upon receiving the call, the Keyport Range Officer directed a range boat supporting the TRIDENT range operation to perform search and rescue. After arriving on-scene, the two boaters were retrieved from the water and a towline was attached to their overturned boat. Concurrently, Jefferson County Fire and Rescue (JCFR) were notified; arriving on the shore in the vicinity of the incident. The individuals and their boat were transported to the shoreline and turned over to the JCFR. The crew was wet and cold, but otherwise unharmed—if not for the assistance provided by the Keyport Range Officer and range boat, it is likely these boaters would not have survived.

For more information on the NEPA process and this range proposal, please contact us at our new address:

Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest (or NAVFAC NW)
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Or visit our website at: http://www-keyport.kpt.nuwc.navy.mil/EIS_Home.htm

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